

Ms. Knuth

ELA 8

28 Jan 2013

Reflecting on “A Ripple of Hope”

What we need in the United States is not division; what we need in the United States is not hatred; what we need in the United States is not violence and lawlessness, but is love, and wisdom, and compassion toward one another, and a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country, whether they be white or whether they be black.

~Robert Kennedy, Indianapolis - April 4, 1968 (Echoes)

Laws have become more just and citizens more accepting since the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., but we still have work to do.

Riots broke out around the country in response to the assassination of Dr. King, and Bobby Kennedy’s speech in Indianapolis to a racially mixed crowd could have become violent, but it didn’t. Kennedy’s words settled the hearts and hands of the thousands listening because he spoke from the heart with love and compassion.

“A Ripple of Hope,” a documentary that retells the events of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination through the lens of Robert Kennedy’s Presidential campaign, reminds me that words have incredible power. The things we say can inspire others or cause despair.

This theme has been bobbing along in my life’s current lately. Over the holiday break, I reread *The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz. The first agreement is to “be

impeccable with your word,” to speak with integrity without fault or blame. Then on January 15, I attended Rebecca Skloot’s webcast lecture with some of my English 10 students at the Beardsley Theater. Skloot, author of *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, gave advice to students and also to teachers. She reminded teachers that “you never know what one sentence will stick, or when.” While this statement is meant to inspire teachers, it is also a reminder that words can harm and become a sticky mess for students.

Words are powerful. Bobby Kennedy’s impromptu speech is an example of the positive impact of heartfelt, impeccable words. He encouraged peace and compassion, things that cannot be realized except through the combined effort of a mixed crowd.

Perhaps Kennedy’s impact on the crowd came through his carefully chosen words, but the manner of his speech also triggered the calming effect. “He didn’t talk to the poor any differently than he talked to the wealthy” (Interviewee, “A Ripple of Hope”). He quoted Greek poetry by his favorite poet, Aeschylus, to poor black people:

Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget
falls drop by drop upon the heart,
until, in our own despair,
against our will,
comes wisdom
through the awful grace of God.

(Echoes)

I am amazed that Kennedy could quote such poetry off the cuff. It is transformative for me and, I hope, my students. I hope that they better understand the power of words and the importance of studying literary arts. It is the Arts that touch our

hearts and inspire us. May we be moved by King, Kennedy, and our own hearts to take joint action toward justice and peace because there is still work to do.

We can ask similar questions to those uttered by Kennedy in his speech. What kind of a nation are we? What direction do we want to move in? We can be filled with bitterness and hatred, or we can make an effort to understand (“A Ripple of Hope”). We have many divisions: race, ethnicity, gender, physique, language, cultural background and beliefs, family structure, sexual orientation, political affiliation, religious affiliation, residential address, occupation, income, etc. Through compassion we can narrow the divide. After all, we have more similarities than differences since we are all one human family.

Works Cited

- A Ripple of Hope*. Dir. Donald Boggs. Covenant Productions, 2013. Netflix.com. Web.
- Echoes of 1968*. NPR, 4 Apr. 2008. Web. 28 Jan. 2013.
- Ruiz, Don Miguel. *The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom*. San Rafael, California: Amber-Allen Publishing, 2001. Print.
- Skloot, Rebecca. "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks." Calvin College The January Series. Webcast. Beardsley Theater, Muskegon, Michigan. 15 Jan. 2013. Lecture.